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Sargent, John Turner

An address on pauperism, delivered before the...

Boston

1846

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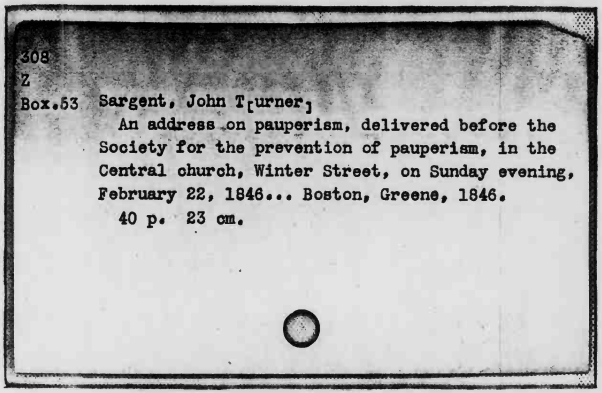
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An address on pauperism, delivered before the Society for the prevention of pauperism, in the Central church, Winter Street, on Sunday evening, February 22, 1846... Boston, Greene, 1846.
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AN

ADDRESS ON PAUPERISM,

DELIVERED BEFORE

THE SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF PAUPERISM,

IN THE

Central Church, Winter Street,

ON

SUNDAY EVENING, FEBRUARY 22, 1846.

BY

JOHN T. SARGENT,

PASTOR OF THE FIRST CONGREGATIONAL SOCIETY IN SOMERVILLE

"*Indigence exists by the vanity of opulence.*"

ZIMMERMAN.

BOSTON:

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ADDRESS.

THE society in whose behalf we are now assembled, has important and peculiar relations to the welfare of our city and our social interests generally. It has claims upon public sympathy, just so far superior to those of other societies, as the purpose or practice of *preventing* an evil is better than the application of remedies to that evil after it exists and is rankling. For nearly thirteen years now, it has been concerned in efforts to anticipate and prevent, within the sphere of its action, those festering ills of extreme poverty which annoy the conscience of society, and over which the Philanthropist, the Economist and the Christian have mourned and deliberated for centuries, as over the greatest enigma of human life. Connected with its organization and management, we see the wisdom of experience and the warmth of benevolence. Its officers are men of acknowledged influence and discretion throughout the city. Its objects are no less than to meet half way the disconsolate applicants for charity, to find them employment, to exercise a wise and faithful inquiry into all cases of suffering among us, and so baffle imposture. It accomplishes this, mainly, through

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a central office of reference in behalf of females among the poor who are seeking employment, and the families who need their assistance. It has all the efficiency, and a good deal more than the efficiency, of an "intelligence office," so called, without any of the low dealing, chicanery, and cunning craftiness, which have made such establishments but too notorious. Its resources are found chiefly in the annual subscriptions of its members, and the fees of such families as apply for its benefits, and its results the past year are shown in the reports of its agents, the senior of whom has but recently, in the providence of God, departed from these scenes of his humble and charitable service, to that world where blessings await those who have served the Saviour by their service of the least of these his brethren. By the death of Mr. Bascom, the society feel, indeed, that they have lost a faithful and patient laborer in this field of benevolent action; and so also by the decease of their worthy President, the late Samuel Dorr, they are reminded of their obligation to be faithful to the benevolent enterprises of which he was ever the kind patron and the devoted friend. In the departure of these worthy men, may we find additional incentive to "work while it is day." The best monument we can raise over them is the success of this society, in which they manifested so true an interest. May their virtues and their worth be enshrined in our memories.

The report of this society, to which I have alluded, states that, within the past year, the number of applicants at the office for employment has been four thousand five hundred and thirty-one. Of these, four thousand and seventy-five were foreigners, and only four

hundred and fifty-six American; while two hundred and seventy-seven were under fifteen years of age. Out of the whole number of applicants, three thousand two hundred have been supplied with places; five hundred and forty-two more than in any preceding year — one thousand seven hundred and eighty-nine within the city, and one thousand four hundred and eleven out of it — two thousand nine hundred and fifty two foreigners, and two hundred and forty-eight American. It is believed, the operations and usefulness of the society might be greatly increased, were its subscription list extended, and its objects more generally understood and appreciated by families throughout the city. We would fain see the office of this society more widely recognised as a kind of central depot for information in regard to all charitable operations in our city; the head-quarters of benevolent action, at which all the other benevolent associations are to report themselves, and from which they may go forth as useful and more efficient ramifications. This society would seem to deserve such a pre-eminence, not only on account of its professed purpose, the *prevention* of pauperism, but in view of the amount of good it has actually done, and is doing, to this end. It seems, there are now connected with benevolent action in this city, some twenty-five or more different associations, which report their doings once a month at the office of this, and some five or six omit so to do, there being in all about thirty-three charitable societies in the city; and so the delinquents, of course, are liable as they deserve, to lose whatever benefit might result to them from such concerted action. The duties and labors of an agent in the office of this association must

be somewhat arduous, as any one may see, and deserve, if they are rightly performed, an adequate compensation — for, surely, if in any case "the laborer is worthy of his hire," it must be that one who labors all day and every day to see that others receive *their* hire and *their* labor. You may go into this "Office of Visiters of the Poor" on the forenoon of any day, and find it thronged with applicants for employment, of all ages; and, we are told in the report, that three thousand two hundred of such persons have been supplied with good places and employment the past year. And not only so, but we are coming to realize every day, in this city, that, by the same good agency, scarcely any such thing is now known as street beggary or a lounging vagrancy. And yet, notwithstanding all these laudable results and persevering efforts on the part of this society and others, how stands the fact as regards the present condition and numbers of our pauper population in the city and State?

An abstract of the returns made by our Secretary of State the past year, gives us, as the whole number of paupers supported by the Commonwealth, fourteen thousand one hundred and sixty-one. Of these, it seems, three thousand five hundred and eighty-two were foreigners. Two thousand nine hundred and seventy-three from England and Ireland. The number of Almshouses reported is one hundred and eighty-seven, in which there have been supported four thousand two hundred and twenty-seven persons, at an expense of three hundred and one thousand three hundred and sixty dollars forty-seven cents; or, in round numbers, we have more than fourteen thousand persons supported as

paupers by the Commonwealth the past year, at an expense of more than three hundred thousand dollars. Then, to come nearer home, we have, in the city, according to the same report, three thousand five hundred and ninety-three persons supported as paupers the past year. Of these, one thousand one hundred and twenty-eight had a legal settlement within the Commonwealth, and two thousand four hundred and sixty-five were State paupers. Of the State paupers, one thousand six hundred and seventy were foreigners, and of these latter, one thousand four hundred and sixty-eight were natives of England and Ireland. Of the whole number of paupers, one thousand four hundred and eighty-four were supported or relieved within the almshouse. One hundred and five foreign paupers became so within the year. Twenty-six insane, eighteen idiots, and forty-four by reason of idiocy are supported by the city. The value of the almshouse establishment is said to be one hundred thousand dollars; supporting, on an average, five hundred and fifty paupers, at an expense of nearly one dollar per week. And the whole amount of expenditure for paupers the past year within the city, is forty-five thousand dollars. Of the whole number of paupers within the city, one thousand six hundred were probably made so by intemperance, and nearly seven thousand throughout the State, were made so by the same cause. According to returns relative "to the House of Correction" the past year, it appears, that of four hundred and eighteen males in that establishment, two hundred or more were committed as common drunkards, and of the one hundred and ninety-one females under the same discipline, one hundred and forty-seven, or about three-fourths of the whole number, were

put there for the same cause. Only think of it! more than one half of all the commitments for intemperance! See, too, how this all-consuming evil of pauperism is discrowning all the kingdoms of the old world! "A recent statement says, that in Belgium one-sixth of the population are poor, and most of these in extreme want. In Holland there are twelve paupers to every one hundred inhabitants. In Prussia, since 1815, the number of the poor has quadrupled. In Austria the numbers are rapidly increasing. In the Lombardo-Venetian Kingdom, the official statements are appalling; it being said of Venice, that half its inhabitants are destitute. In Germany, the advance of pauperism is the motive which drives so many of its citizens to our country. At Copenhagen, the poor tax has just doubled within the last ten years. At Stockholm, the increase of paupers, taking the last one hundred years, is one to fifteen. In some of the cantons of Switzerland, the peasants have renounced their rights of citizenship in order to escape the payment of the enormous poor rates. The same facts are officially stated of Piedmont, Italy, Spain and Portugal, and are corroborated by the bandits who levy contributions on travellers and sometimes on villages. Paris has eighty thousand paupers registered at its Bureau of Beneficence, and sixty thousand more are said to live on the products of crime. The city of Lisle has twenty-five thousand poor among seventy thousand inhabitants, and Mentz, Strasbourg, Lyons, Bordeaux, are almost devoured by this lamentable evil." *

With such astounding facts before us, such an accumu-

* See Prof. Brooks's Remarks on Europe, p. 24.

lation of wretchedness, the question naturally arises, what can be the causes of such evils as we are called upon to witness and to counteract? Whence originates this disease, which rots the globe and gnaws so into the vitals of our cities, and the beating heart of our own Commonwealth?

The causes of pauperism have been variously assigned to be — Ignorance, Idleness, Intemperance, the difficulty of obtaining work, and the insufficiency of the compensation for labor when it *is* obtained. But I believe we may go behind all these and find the real cause of pauperism in that one great towering enormity of our social organization, the disproportionate influence allowed to *wealth* among us — the invidious classification of different ranks in society, as respectable or otherwise, according as they possess wealth, those habits and modes of life which are built upon the idea of *property* as constituting the main thing or influence in our community — the forced associations and separations of the rich and poor. In these, or rather in this one conglomerate cause, I see the root and the explanation of the whole evil.

In this one, then, I would roll up or include all the rest, as in one great ball of fire, while I hurl it as I may, and with what force I can, amid the consciences of the community, to explode, or kindle some better conviction of our duty. I believe, that in our greedy pursuit of wealth — our gross idolatry to its acquisition, the aristocratic fashion of our domestic, industrial and social life, and the tendency which these habits have to widen still more the gulf between different classes in society, we have the fruitful, unfailing and primary cause of all the mischief.

Let us see, now, by a single glance, in what way and to what extent this is true, and how all the other commonly alleged causes of pauperism may find their explanation in this one. We say, for example, that *Ignorance* is a cause of pauperism. But whence comes the ignorance of the poor man, and what inducement or opportunity has he for self-culture, if so be, by our social system or by the nature of his toil and trial, his time or spirits be exhausted by exactions of the rich, with the disappointment, too often, of inadequate or no compensation? Engrossed with the thought of how he may get his bread from day to day, what occasion has he for acquiring that knowledge which might insure him greater success? Can we not see the solution of the evil in that system of labor in society which constrains him to such unremitting solicitude and slavery?

And so of *Intemperance*. We say, often, and we say truly, that *Intemperance* is a cause of pauperism; but what is the cause of intemperance? I say, without hesitation, a fruitful cause of it, the *most* fruitful, is the depressing injustice which the poor man often meets with from his employer. Having labored all day in "the sweat of his brow," he goes home *unpaid* to a suffering and hungry family. In place of the pence he expected to receive in payment for his toil and for the purchase of daily bread, he has nothing but *promises*. Day after day he is so deluded and stung by disappointment, till at last, overcome by the sickening weight of his "hope deferred," he seeks, in the excitement of a dram-shop, the oblivion of his wrongs. Alas! of how many a drunken pauper is this the sad history! And

still, in other ways is society responsible for much of the intemperance complained of among the poor. The poor man is virtually taught by the rich, very often, to feel that the great charm of life is earthly excitement. He sees the prosperous very nigh smothered in luxury, and pursuing such excitement with the most incessant and insatiable avidity in theatres and banquet-rooms. He witnesses in all the circumstances that surround the wealthy, the most studious regard for worldly gratification. He creeps along, feebly and shivering, of a winter's night, through some fashionable street, in search of a lodging somewhere else beneath a woodpile or the shed of a distillery; and then, about midnight, is carried back in the grasp of a watchman or the police, along that same street, where the sounds of gay revelry from brilliant saloons are forced upon his ear with a painful contrast, telling him, that in his case, the excitement of a gill of rum in the open street is not so venial an offence as even similar excitement wrought elsewhere by champaigne or burgundy, beneath the cover of damask curtains, in a select party. And so he sickens at the contrast between his lot and that of the more fortunate, who, as he thinks, bow lower than he at the shrine of excitement. I repeat it, then, the rich are responsible for much of the inebriety which they make so penal in the case of the poor. Every thing in their homes seems tributary to the senses — the satisfaction of some worldly appetite. A crowd of dainty epicures sits down at the table of the opulent sensualist, we will suppose, and while the poor man stands, a menial behind the chair of his employer, he is entertained by eloquent encomiums and criticisms on this kind of wine or

that — its age, quality, and cost, while the sparkling glass fails not to have its visible effect upon the guests. And so this looker-on, from the poorer class of society, has learned *this* lesson at least from those who are deemed more enlightened than he; that the sources of happiness are to be found in "good living," so called, and a glass of wine! Most admirable instruction, truly!

Let us see how faithfully it is improved by our poor friend who waited on the table: — first, by his emptying, in his own behalf, all the trickling remnants of the feast, from the glasses and bottles on the table, after the company have retired, and then, by recourse to the stronger potions of brandy in the cellar, and afterward by regular draughts at the grocery-store, when he is expelled from the house for *intemperance*, which his *employer* has caused, and, lastly, by the full cup and o'erflowing climax of his misery, in the almshouse! O wretched poor! For how many of your sins and woes is society responsible, by its idle, thoughtless, and luxurious customs!

And now, I ask, with what face can the rich man cast upon the poor the accusation of a sin for his intemperance, when he actually encourages and generates that sin too often, by his own domestic habits? How can he expect the poor man to practice a self-denial, of which he, in his superior light, does not set the example? Or with what propriety denounce the wretched inebriate, when all the habits of social life, among those to whom the inebriate looks for an example and encouragement, are such as to foster in him a love of excitement, a passion for stimulus. Must we not admit that any social customs among the rich which have this tendency are wrong — all wrong?

Again — the same conclusions may be drawn with regard to *Idleness* as a cause of pauperism. By the most absurd conventionalities, the idea of *labor*, manual labor, as a general thing is quite too much degraded among the rich. Hard work is in disrepute among too many of them. They can hardly deign to associate with such as are engaged in the menial trades or humbler occupations. To be men of leisure is to be quite elite and respectable. Thus, among the poor, an odium comes to be attached to certain offices, that are thought to imply subordination, such as the office of a domestic in a family — so that hundreds and thousands of poor girls now, had rather work for less wages in a factory, or almost none at all in a tailor's shop, than be subjected to the slavish mortification of such family connections. You may see this illustrated by those items in the report of this society, which state that of four thousand five hundred and thirty-one female applicants for employment at this office the past year, only four hundred and fifty-six were American, while about nine tenths of the whole number are foreigners. Do you not see in this fact some reason to believe, that, from one cause or another, our native population are becoming disaffected towards that peculiar application of their service in families? And what can be the reason of their dislike? Is it not that too wide or invidious and disagreeable a contrast is instituted between those who sit at ease in one part of the house and those who serve in the other? Why, I heard, not long ago,

of a wealthy family in this city whose heads had piety enough, it seems, to go through the form of reading family prayers, but they took the precaution to make 'the domestics' bring in the kitchen chairs with them, rather than run the risk of having their drawing-room seats injured or soiled by contact with plebeians! What an insult this to the Christian religion and the spirit of its meek and lowly founder, so to mingle earthly and sensual motives with its devotional acts! It seems as if the Almighty might give the archangels a commission to barricade the very heavens against the supplications of any such Pharisees!

The other causes of pauperism to which I have alluded — such as the difficulty of procuring work and the insufficiency of compensation for labor, when obtained, are so palpably owing to circumstances over which the wealthier classes have more or less control, that we need not dwell upon them with any extended argument. "It would appear hardly credible," says another, "and yet it is no more strange than true, that hundreds of ladies who affect the very acme of piety and benevolence, and manifest extreme anxiety for the preservation and promotion of good morals among virtuous females, and the restoration of the fallen portion, may be found arrayed in the very garments on which those females have toiled for fourteen hours a day, for the paltry compensation of twenty-five cents. And the worst of it is, that the ladies, when engaged in their apparently pious and benevolent labors, are fully aware of the degrading fact."

Much is said of the impositions practiced by the poor, in order to secure the means of living. Indeed, we hear of a case in Philadelphia, just now, of an

individual who had been for a long time receiving aid as a pauper in that city, but who is ascertained to have left, on his decease, a fortune of more than fifty thousand dollars! Similar cases of deception are not unfrequently detailed, I suppose. They are mortifying and discouraging to every philanthropist. They deserve, wherever they are found, the condemnation of every honest man. But what do they prove? And what is the lesson they teach us? They indicate the ruling passion for gain, which has gone fully and far down into the poorest heart of our community, rotting away all its fair principles and integrity. They show that the poor are learning, too unfortunately, the general lesson impressed by our commercial habits, that accumulation of property, and the distinction so acquired, is the main thing, and must be compassed by fair means or by foul, and at all hazards. When we hear of such a case, or any case of imposition among the *poor*, we punish it by the most unmitigated expression of our displeasure. The retributive action of some benevolent society, or of *all* the benevolent societies, is brought to bear upon it. We talk it over in our public meetings of the delegates of those societies, with a kind of jeering vengeance. We go into all the details of the case, with jealous interest. We cross the name of the poor unfortunate offender off our books. We turn our backs upon him, and brand him forever afterwards with the name of *impostor*. We persecute and proscribe him "even unto strange cities," and we call in question the wisdom or Christian prudence of any one, who attempts to aid that individual. Any purpose of assistance from any quarter to such an outcast, is

thought to be a sure indication of consummate folly, and a want of discretion, and so the poor victim is cut off finally from all sympathy, and all prospect of bettering his condition. Nor can I omit to mention in this connection, as one of the causes of pauperism, the stringent and exclusive action adopted in too many cases towards the newly discharged convicts from our State prison. It was only the last week, that a pale, miserable and hopeless-looking man came to me with a request for my attendance on the funeral of his all but starved and frozen child; and, after the melancholy service was over, he told me the sorrowful tale of his experience in this particular, as an outlawed sufferer in this community. He had been once or twice in prison, he said, for offences forced upon him by the unkindness and prejudices of his fellow-men. He had striven, once and again, to rise from the depths of his disgrace, by diligence in such employments as he could procure; but, no sooner had his heart began to sing over his work with hope, in the prospect of bettering his condition and supporting his family, than some evil-minded person would come and whisper in the ears of his employer, "That man has been in the State's prison," and immediately he was dismissed from service. Twice and again was he so treated, till at last, he had given up in despair, feeling as if no hope were left him. With a little exertion, some employment was once more procured for him, but not without some difficulty in overcoming the scruples of others as to taking a discharged convict. Such then is, too often, the unchristian, the oppressive, the inconsiderate prejudice, which baffles the efforts of patient and repentant men to work

out their own salvation, and double locks their dungeon doors! And yet, what class of men can there be, having stronger claims on the benevolent sympathy of those who profess to be influenced by kindly motives and the principles of that Saviour who was so eminently the Prisoner's Friend? *

Branded with odium — avoided like an infection, excluded from all useful employment, instead of being taken by the hand with encouragement in his penitence, what wonder that the ex-prisoner finally falls back hopelessly upon his former sins — perhaps upon the stone floor of his former cell! It is owing to society, I say, the conventional prejudices of society, that he is so driven back. The individuals that give society its tone, have something to answer for in their rigid treatment towards the returning prodigal. The action of the community, touching the reformation of the individual, is, too often, nugatory and repellant. Hence, the miseries of pauperism are riveted upon the community and the individual sufferer, with a tenfold power. Hence the deep sense of wrong which is cut so sharply into the heart of the poor man, when he sees there is no evenness of justice in his case, compared with that of others, and that the rich man does not meet with the same retribution of popular odium when he embezzles or defalcates. Hence the aggravation of this tendency to cheat among all classes, as the pauper finds he must, after all,

* We are glad to know, that, since the delivery of this address, some action has been had, and with good prospect of success, in behalf of an asylum for the reception and encouragement of discharged convicts. We commend this purpose to the sympathies of the benevolent.

wring out of society the support which it only begrudges or withholds. How painful now the contrast we sometimes witness between the social position or treatment of a rich swindler and a poor thief! The wealthy villain, who moves by more than sufferance in "the first society," so called, the man who has robbed the bank or forged a note for some thousands of dollars in the process of his commercial transactions, is sheltered and protected at once beneath the broad wings and peacock feathers of his rich relatives. The whole affair is soon hushed up, and he goes on, as usual, "on 'change," with his head up, and with no perceptible abatement in his style of living — while a poor wretch from the purlieus of Broad street, who has stolen a crust out of that man's kitchen, is hunted to the death, and feels the hot iron of excommunication burnt awfully into his very bones! Now, I am not saying that we ought to shelter the frauds of a pauper any more than of a prince, from the retributive consequences that must ever storm down, sooner or later, upon the heads and hearts of the dishonest every where; but I say, for mercy's sake, as we make the equity of Christ our rule, let us be just in our visitations and verdicts on each class. Let us hold the scale of our judgments evenly and fairly; and if, because a poor man has deceived us, we tear off his remnant of rags and send him shivering and naked and excommunicated through society, a mark for the finger of scorn to point at, let us also cleave asunder the glittering shield of social favor, behind which an opulent knave has sought his protection, and tear away no less boldly those entrenchments, beneath which his vice finds but too ready an absolution. We are not sparing, it seems,

in our denunciation of a *pauper's* deceptions. It were well if we visited some of it upon the wealthier defaulters, who encroach on the treasures of the bank, or play tricks upon their creditors and games of chance for self at the broker's board. What wonder that the poor seek apologies for their imposture and devices in the all but consecrated practices of commercial life! Living among those whose idol deity seems to be property, wealth, station, they look invidiously on those who possess it, and seek to clutch, sometimes per force, the means of a similar distinction. In the want of money they are made to feel their hopeless exclusion from all the privileges which money alone can command, and the sole cause of their seeming degradation. They see that respectability, influence, power, attaches to the possession of property. They see, also, that *want* of influence, weight and favor, is the consequence of its absence. In short, every thing in our modes of life and our social institutions, seems to force upon them the disagreeable conviction, that by these conventional theories they are outlawed and aggrieved.

"Our present civilization," says the late Dr. Channing, in his famous letter to Birney, "is characterized and tainted by a devouring greediness of wealth. The passion for gain is every where sapping pure and generous feeling, and every where raises up bitter foes against any reform which may threaten to turn aside a stream of wealth. I sometimes feel as if a great social revolution were necessary to break up our present mercenary civilization, in order that Christianity, now repelled by the almost universal worldliness, may come into new contact with the soul, and may reconstruct society after its own pure and disinterested principles."

Do my hearers ask now, where is the *proof* of this all-devouring,' all-engrossing passion for wealth, as a social distinction? Look around you in this populous and fast growing city of Boston. See the magnificent ware-rooms with all the aspect of marble palaces — millions of dollars consolidated in a single block, ranging like a wall of flint through whole streets, where once were the dwellings of our fathers, and pushing away our condensed, and flurried, and panting population into the teeming suburbs!

Look, too, at our style of living, our equipages, our expensive dwellings and their costly furniture! Rapid approximation to the modes of life in European cities is every where visible. It is no very unusual thing in this city, and still less in New York, to see servants in livery, on a coach and four with armorial bearings, riding rough shod all round the parks and common! Mrs. Child, in her letters from New York, says, that foreign artistic upholsterers assert, that there will soon be more houses in that city furnished according to the fortune and taste of noblemen, than there are either in Paris or London; and this prophecy may well be believed, when the fact is considered, that it is already not very uncommon to order furniture for a single room at a cost of ten, twenty or thirty thousand dollars. There would be no reason to regret this lavishness, if the convenience and beauty of social environment were really increased in proportion to the expenditure, and if there were a progressive tendency to equality in the distribution. But, alas! a few moments' walk from saloons superbly furnished in the style of Louis XIV., brings us to "Loafers' Hall, a dreary, desolate apartment, where shivering

little urchins pay a cent a-piece for the privilege of keeping out of watchmen's hands, by sleeping on boards ranged in tiers."

And now, the worst of it is, that this passion for show among the rich is not confined to them. It works its way, by infection, among the poorer classes, and perhaps no passion is stronger among *them*, than the hope of one day living in a swelled-front house, and so equalling or surpassing their wealthier neighbors. Indeed, so thoroughly have they learned their lesson of the rich, that if they *have* any means, they are just as likely to live beyond them, because they see it is the fashion so to do; and, with them as with the rich, the conditions of their intercourse and fellowship, strange as it may seem, are graduated by the considerations of a certain caste among themselves, for they *have* a caste, in the usually frivolous questions whether their neighbors live in a two-story house or a ten-foot building; whether they "keep help" or do their own work; and whether they make shoes or build houses, or whether they go to a free chapel or a costly church. And thus we see how truly "a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump." The witty saying of one of our popular lecturers and essayists, that "the aristocrat is only the old democrat run up to seed," is true enough, and finds its exposition in all the circumstances and experiences of our social life. It is curious to observe how circumstances alter *consciences* as well as cases, and how the poor themselves, in a change of fortune, will immediately copy all the absurdities, extravagancies and purse-proud airs which they once denounced in the rich. No sooner does a man of limited means come in pos-

session, suddenly or otherwise, of a considerable fortune, than he proceeds to entrench himself in the very customs and exclusive conventionalities of the wealthier circle, which he once thought so ridiculous — and it only shows the force of that popular opinion, which has made wealth and the distinctions of wealth the great, irresistible, omnipotent criterion of social influence. It is plain, that our danger lies now in such a servile copying of foreign customs in our style of dress, living and domestic economy, that the lines of separation will be wider and wider between different classes, and open for us, finally, a gulf of invidious distinctions, broader and deeper than that into which Marcus Curtius leaped, on horseback, for the salvation of Rome! We are bringing into our homes, and into all the relations of social life, such conditions of fellowship as must inevitably tend to the multiplication of all the evils of poverty, if not seasonably checked. Nor is this all, nor the worst; for we have brought and are bringing this same spirit of vain display and of earthly distinctions, and what another has called "the aristocracy of culture," too fully and too fast into the very temples of our worship, and up to the very altars of our God! Ay — *there*, even, where naught but humility and penitence should come, on their bended knees, with a drooping head and a broken heart, those same wretched, mean, unworthy separations of social caste are allowed to come in and cling to us as we cling to them. And so, forsooth, we must lumber up our temples with a luxurious and expensive paraphernalia, and have our pews put under an estimate corresponding to the worldly rank of those who are to worship in them — with a lock and a key

or a bolt on some of them, if we may believe the rumor, as if to make the exclusion more complete, and as if none but the world's elect were to sit there. And is this the way for us to consecrate or excuse our insane worship of Mammon, by gilding the side walls and ceilings of our sanctuaries ostentatiously, softening our seats there, and casting some tithes of our too oft ill-gotten gold upon its glittering altars? Is this the way to prove that we are any better Christians than they who sit on a pine board, or in no pews at all? Shall we think to cheat the Almighty, or even a mortal man into the belief that we are saints, because we sit in a more costly and beautiful church than our neighbors, or because we have written the commandments in gold letters upon its frescoed walls and vestry? Is that any proof that we are *keeping* them? It were well, indeed, if we *did* oftener observe "the handwriting on the wall" of our palaces and banquet-rooms. "To what purpose," saith the Lord, "is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? I am full of the burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed beasts, and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he-goats. When ye come to appear before me who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts? Bring no more vain oblations — incense is an abomination unto me. Wash you — make you clean. Put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes. Cease to do evil. Learn to do well. Seek judgment. Relieve the oppressed — judge the fatherless; plead for the widow."

Now, in these remarks, I do not mean to imply, that all regard to comfort and good effect in our churches should be set aside. Far from it. No doubt, some

degree of expense is both allowable and necessary in the erection and furnishing of our places of worship — some regard even to bodily comfort and the proprieties of place — some study, if you will, to produce an impressive and serious effect upon the mind, through the visible arrangements of architecture. But I will and do remonstrate, when I see a lavish or needless expenditure in this connection. I will and do complain, when I see every thing else sacrificed to merely worldly or ambitious considerations — when I see in the erection of single churches in this city, or any city, an extravagant and superfluous outlay of money, which might, by a more considerate distribution, have spread joy and gladness inexpressible through many a waste place of our Zion, and made the wilderness to blossom as the rose. I will protest, when I see the meagre passions and miserable distinctions of the world brought into connection with the church — when I see that there, in the church, as in the world too often, a pride of place and of property, and a foolish competition, are predominant — when I see that the same considerations of social caste are allowed to operate there as in society, thus severing more widely and incurably the various classes in society, by giving, apparently, the sanction of religion, of Christianity, to these separations. Who does not know, for example, that substantially the same distinctions of rank are found to exist in the different aisles and sections of a church, as in the different streets, fashionable or otherwise, in the same city? The occupants of the broad aisle will scarcely notice those who sit in the side pews — have hardly as much dealing with them as the Jews had with the Samaritans; and they in the side pews think themselves quite above those who sit in the gallery — and these, on the other hand, would quite resent it, if you said, they are on a level with the singers; and the minister himself, it may be, thinks he is quite superior to them all. So that the church, and by this I mean an association of worshippers, so called, has very often within itself, in its own bosom, the seeds and fruitful sources of the evils which perplex it, and which it sends out into society fully endorsed. And, I say, nothing has more truly tended to rivet in society its invidious and worldly distinctions — nothing has more strongly aggravated, in my opinion, the evils of poverty so commonly complained of, as the countenance which the church has seemed to give to these separations.

These are strong words, I know, but not more strong than true; and I never see one of these same aristocratic churches, with its magnificent gothic spire stretching far up into the heavens, without thinking how many loaves of bread or Bibles might have been bought by that superfluous outlay. It seems to me like a solemn finger of admonition uplifted over a city; and just in proportion to the number of such spires, must the hand of amazement be thus uplifted, unless beneath them there be manifested enough of the simple and self-denying principles of Christianity, to redeem those churches from worldly imputations.

Why, just look at the fact, that in our principal commercial city of another State, *one church alone* comprises in its plethoric coffers, or within the compass of its huge property, more than seventy millions of dollars, it is said! — has but just completed an edifice

at a cost, for aught I know, of another million (a single building), with a spire whose cost above the ridge-pole of the roof was many a thousand, put up there only to be stared at and stormed upon, while its long shadow streams away from the rising to the setting sun, with its alternate eclipse over hovels of poor wretches who have gone by it many a day on their crutches, wondering, as they gazed upon its magnificent proportions, whether humanity was always going to cheat them so, by the vision of beautiful stones, when they were asking for bountiful bread.

O, believe it, the time must surely come when "not one of these stones shall be left upon another"— but the principles which have actuated us as we piled them up, the sympathies we have shown for suffering humanity, will long survive the wreck of those temples; and then, in that other world, it will be revealed just what, and how much or how little, we have done, in obedience to our Saviour's word, "for the least of these his brethren." Then shall we realize that not every one that merely saith Lord, Lord — not every one that merely piles up the visible sacrifice for the external church, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but *he* only, that *society* only, and that *church* only, which is true to the great principles of brotherly love, individual culture, social improvement and social reform.

And now, you say, supposing all this to be true — that our social organization *is* defective, and that habits of extravagance, luxurious living, &c. are the sources of the evil, how can we help it? What can we do? and where shall we apply the remedy? Our philanthropists and reformers have suggested various plans and expedients, such as Fourier associations and agricultural communities, and these are still in the course of hopeful experiment. We may wish them well, certainly, in consideration of their Christian motive; and, meanwhile, what can we do, as individuals, in our present position, apart from such associations? I answer, make our *homes* in each case a community for reform. "Look at home." *Work* at home, and apply there the remedial measures, each of you, in your own home. Remodel the social state through these channels. Consider what the poor claim of you; especially those poor who are nearest to you — infinitely more than your money, certainly, acceptable as that is. Yes. The suffering portions of society need many other and less equivocal manifestations of our regard, than our dollars and cents.

They need a more intimate sympathy, fellowship, and the unreserved recognition of their equal rights and common brotherhood. They need a fuller acquaintance with whatever is refined, elevating or spiritual in the character or condition of the wealthy. They need the superadded force of their richer brethren's good example, to heighten that respect which too often attaches to difference of rank alone. They need the application and the enjoyment of all those influences, whatsoever they may be, which may arouse and direct their spiritual tastes and spiritual perceptions. In short, they need the improvement of all those connections into which, as by providential necessity, they are thrown with the rich. Many and various are the circumstances and occasions under which the rich and poor are thus brought

together, and mutually act and depend upon each other, in the daily walks of life. Take, in this view, the domestic relation, and how obviously is it one wherein a decidedly moral influence, of one sort or another, must be developed. How inevitable the consequence that persons so brought together, must act upon each other, favorably or otherwise. The principals in a family give the tone more or less to the character of those they employ. In one great particular, certainly, the matter of *economy*, their influence is important and decided; and in this view it may be said, that heads of families often mould the temporal destinies, not only of their children, but of all the rest of their household; and, in many cases, it is to be feared, in such a way that no amount of wages they receive can compensate for the injury inflicted. The moral sway which the mistress of a family is exerting or may exert upon her household companions, is seldom enough considered; nor is it limited within the walls of her mansion, or the characters of the persons she may employ. The young woman, who, in some wealthy family, has occupied a subordinate station of usefulness, goes forth, it may be, to her home, and transfers the lessons she has received, whether of economy or extravagance, to the circle of her poorer kindred and acquaintance. The impressions she has received of life and society, its objects, pleasures and pursuits, are all transmitted to her humbler home in the city, or her father's cottage by the hill-side, in a country village. Let us trace such an one, from her departure, to the time when she returns to that cottage. She leaves it with the fondest benediction of her parents — at an age when the mind is ready for any im-

pressions, and in that modest garb which shows she has not yet bowed to the tyranny of fashion. Under that lowly roof and by the side of her mother's spinning-wheel, she has realized, thus far, enough of happiness to feel, as her Bible has told her, that our life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which we possess. But she is going, now, to learn a different lesson. Constrained by narrow circumstances, her parents send her forth to seek employment, and to take her share of self-dependence. By her industry and thrift, they hope also to have their own burden alleviated. But mark the discipline, which (I say not in every instance, but in too many cases) the scholar reaps from her instructer. She enters the well-furnished mansion of the metropolis. In place of that economy which had characterized the arrangements of her home, she sees, too often, a careless disregard of every thing like frugality. The very crums which fall from the rich man's table, would furnish a feast at her father's house. Habits of waste become familiar, and she soon learns, with indifference, to throw aside the very fragments, which a better prudence, with a Christian motive, would have gathered up. Her wages, which might have added many a comfort to the lot of her suffering parents, and which at first, she never dreamed of appropriating to any other purpose, are expended on silks, new bonnets and ribbons. She adopts more and more of the genteeler heresies of opinion or practice, which she sees in those about her. A reluctance to the duties of her station begins to appear. She leaves it and goes home to her impoverished parents; and then, instead

of the devoted child, the efficient helper, the improved associate, whom they fondly hoped to see, they have returned to them a flighty, flippant, inefficient creature, with perverted taste and false views of life and its duties, hardly deigning to enter the plain abode of her parents, and destined to be, in future, nothing more than a moth on their scanty substance, instead of ministering to their needs. And whence the change? Go ask in those abodes of affluence, around whose reeking altars of waste the injured one has served. And oh! how many are the tragedies begun in those saloons, and whose issues are unfolded more remotely in the spheres of humbler life! There, in those mansions of plenty misapplied, you will find, too often, a subtle, secret, but sure enginery at work, thwarting, in a measure, all the public efforts and appliances which are aiming to relieve the poor. We form associations of various sorts for the relief of the poor and the prevention of pauperism, while, at the same time, we are multiplying, often tenfold, the evils of poverty around our very hearthstones. We establish benevolent societies and ministries to the poor in our suffering cities, but of what avail is it, except as a partial remedy, so long as there are private mills and manufactories of pauperism in our luxurious homes, turning out every day upon those cities and the world, scores of improvident, ignorant, or inefficient dependants. Do I state this matter too strongly? I think not. Nay, I know of many a poor and destitute wife and mother, who, but for the schooling she has had in those colleges of extravagance, might have been a happy, thrifty and prosperous housewife; but now, alas, she is the inmate

of an almshouse, and deserted by her disappointed husband. And what was her earlier history? It has been told you already. She came forth, like many others, from the discipline of wealthier establishments. She married, knowing little, or worse than nothing of the frugal duties of her station. Her husband's little property was wasted by her mismanagement, till at last, they were both thrown upon the list of paupers — the victims, not of malice, but of absolute neglect.

And do you ask now, where 's the remedy for all this? And will you say it must be found only in the action of benevolent societies, or a ministry out of doors to meet the emergency? Nay, but I say, with ourselves it must be found — in our own homes it must be found in part. And let us see to it, that the influences of home do not seriously counteract the ministry of charity which acts, and walks, and works abroad. Important it certainly is, to organize and sustain in every populous city, a ministry to the poor — a ministry to the dark lanes of a dense metropolis. The importance of such a ministry is no longer a matter of question or experiment; but I can scarcely deem it less important, that we faithfully apply that ministry we have, or *ought* to have within our own doors, within the circle of our own families, within the little flock that is gathered under our own roof. Let each of us, then — each family — each head of a family, be, as it were, within itself, the source and centre of a ministry, according to its means and ability, and then shall we have less need of *extraneous* ministries.

I have dwelt thus, at length, upon this matter, because I verily believe, with all our arguments, and lectures, and speculations in respect to pauperism and its causes, we too often overlook those which lie nearest to us, in our own bosoms, and are operating absolutely within our own homes.

Household extravagance, I repeat it, is a fruitful cause of pauperism. We need "*home missions*" — domestic missions, in more senses than one. For my own part, I long for the time, and I will earnestly hope and pray for it, when every family shall be so evangelized as to supersede the necessity of a separate and official service to the poor — when the rich and poor, if they cannot meet together in the house of God, as they ought to, shall meet in the religious sympathies of their daily habitation. In this way, as it seems to me, the rich have it in their power to benefit the poor vastly, by letting their moral influence radiate, if no further, at least within the circle of their homes, by the illustration of every social and domestic virtue — by walking before their households in the exemplary practice of temperance, economy and meekness. But beyond their homes they may do much by visiting, counselling, consoling, the needy at *their* homes. I fear the affluent do not know as fully or as often as they might, the luxury of their wealth or privilege, by making it a passport to the homes of the destitute and sorrowing. I fear they leave such visits too much to their official agents and proxies; and yet to such homes, sometimes, they ought to go, if they would realize a right self-improvement, or read the most affecting lessons of human life, experience, providence and duty. There, if any where,

selfishness is rebuked and put to shame amid the sober circumstance of wo, and there we see the examples very often, of a resignation, a trust, a patience, a disinterestedness, a devotion to duty, which only religion can account for, and only they who have partaken of the spirit of Christ can exhibit. There, very often (so my observation testifies), the virtues and graces of a Christian character are found beneath the pressure of adverse fortune, like green grass and flowers underneath the snows of the forest. And it is worth our while to go now and then within the influence of such a blessed spirit; and to go not only for the good we may *get*, but the good we may *do*. Our sympathy, our prayers, our conversation, our presence, advice and consolation and tears, are worth something to those poor sufferers. The nameless little offices of good will — a word of kindly solace, the smoothing of a pillow, the cup of cold water, a verse from the Scriptures — how consoling they are to the lonely and forlorn! God only knows whether they *have* any friend but you and yours on earth; and, possibly, without you and yours, they may pine beneath a breaking heart. And, oh, how many there are who linger thus alone in populous cities, unprayed for and unaided, without a friend to hear their parting sigh, with their aching bodies on the cold earth or the bare floor of a cheerless tenement! How many there are who faint away wretchedly in their sickness, while their spirits are flickering, for the want of that oil which some good Samaritan might supply. Oh, the luxury of visiting them in their solitude, and seeing that unwonted smile on their features when your feet come in over their threshhold; to sit by their bedsides

and quell the fevers of their souls by your communings! What a refreshment is this amid the tumults and pursuits of a thoughtless world! Go, then, ye who dwell in prosperous homes. Visit the afflicted. Send them somewhat of your luxuries and your light. Go and taste yet one more privilege in the comfortless dwellings of the poor, the sick, the suffering. Go, and bow down your spirits by the bedside of those, who, in dying, will leave nothing but their memories. Go ye, one and all, who have time, or treasure, or pity to spare; for, be assured, "it is better to go to the house of mourning than the house of feasting." So shall your treasures be sanctified, and the blessing of those who are ready to perish will be upon your heads.

But you say you *cannot* go. You have no time. Your avocations, your business, your position may prevent. Well, then, I am sure you will all the more encourage those whose office and privilege it is so to communicate by their associated action. You will encourage them by continuing all the means and facilities for so needful a ministration. Not only in this society, in whose behalf I speak, but in several others analogous to this, may you see the claim of a positive duty on your part to sympathise and assist. The prevailing idea, which I would have you gather from this address, is, that the truest charity is that which approximates most nearly the action or expression of the individual heart of Christ, and that *public* charity is the best which is built on the idea of the family relation, the domestic sympathies, home affections.

In this connection, then, let me draw your attention to some public charities which seem to illustrate this

idea most fully, as they are working to this end — the promotion of economy — "*the prevention of pauperism.*" Take such an institution, for example, as the "Farm School," which takes poor little boys, like "brands from the burning" of our city's temptations, and whose object is by all the associations of a farm-house and of an agricultural seminary, to form in them habits of industry and a moral taste.

Take the "Orphan Asylum" and several others, or the recently organized "Institution for the Education of Adults," in this city, which gathers young men and others at convenient hours, for instruction in the several branches of a common school education. How needful the instruction of such, when we consider their temptations and liabilities to vagrancy and vice, and consequently our own dangers from any neglect of them. The late Mayor of Albany said that "every riot and disturbance in that city, within the last ten years, could be traced to vicious boys under sixteen years of age." How important, then, that we defend ourselves against similar dangers and disgrace, by a wise and systematic religious and secular education of all such youth. Perhaps no one institution among us, on the whole, is doing more in its way to this beneficent end than one other which I will name, and that is the "Association of Warren street Chapel." I know of no one that has proved more efficacious or consistent in its operations and its plans. I number it among the most important of our instrumentalities for the prevention of pauperism, because its influence is applied specially to the young, and so *begins at the right end of humanity.* For years it has continued to impart

even as it has received — the kingdom of heaven to little children. With its wreaths of evergreen surrounding the crosses that hang upon its inner wall, and scattering flowers all along its pathways and altar-sides for the poorest children, it has gone on patiently and prospering. It augurs well for our city, that not only through this avenue, but through similar associations and by different denominations in all parts of our city, the means of religious and moral culture to all classes are becoming more and more extended.

A wise community will, of course, make its privileges of education commensurate with the growth of its population, and who does not see that the growth of our city is now beyond all former precedent, rapid and far-reaching — bringing in a tide of the employment-seeking and the poor, whose moral and religious necessities, like their physical wants, must be met? *How* they shall be met is no longer a question or problem of philosophy. We have answered it by our organized ministries at large; and if ever there were a time when that ministry needed the most prompt, unwavering and hearty support, it is the present, when this general influx of population by increased facilities of travel, brings home the question, what shall we do *with* these poor and *for* them. To that inquiry the only true answer is — *evangelize* them; *discipline*, *direct*, *instruct* them. Give them, as you can, above all else, a rational consistent, all-consoling faith — a faith which shall meet them every where in their seekings, console them in their troubles, enrich them in their needs, sustain them in their sickness, prepare them for death, and open for them the way to heaven. And withal, let us

give them a courteous, unreserved and hearty fellowship. I fear that in our intercourse and dealings with the poor, we are too often lacking in a tender sympathy of manner towards them, a Christ-like lenity towards their failings — a fair consideration of the circumstances which have made them so poor and sometimes so fraudulent — circumstances, too, for which society itself is responsible, as I have said, and we, ourselves, more or less, *with* society. I fear we do not, in all cases, exercise towards them that disposition of brotherly love which proceeds from the consciousness of our common relations and of our Saviour's concern for them. I should deprecate any disposition of our benevolent societies to choose for their agents or almoners mere coldhearted overseers, armed with the whip-cord and cat-o'-nine-tails of a wordly caution. I should fear to see the hearts of our visiters to the poor becoming ossified by their experience, or wrapped around by the frigid calculations of policy or suspicion; for, in such a temper I should see, at once, a fruitful and inevitable cause of that very pauperism which it is their object to prevent. And here, as it seems to me, is one of the dangers to which, as visiters of the poor, we are liable — the possible effect of experience to indurate the sensibilities — the danger of being encrusted with prejudices and suspicions towards the poor, because we may, perchance, have been deceived. I dread this, for I believe nothing will so soon send the poor man back to crouch and die with a gnashing of teeth in his den of degradation, as the consciousness of being ill-used, as he is, by that mean, miserable, supercilious, overbearing, close-fisted policy, which teases him with a thou-

sand cross-questions, and flings suspicion or distrust upon all he says. I know it is often argued in palliation of this rigid temper towards the poor, that we *must* be plain with them, and that a great strictness of investigation is all-important as a precaution against imposture. But I do not believe it. I believe, on the contrary, that in nine cases out of ten, they who exercise the most rigid precautions, are the most likely to be, and are, *in fact*, deceived much more than those who exhibit a confidence on the other extreme.

And now, in conclusion, we may say with full faith, that the evils incident to the extreme contrasts in our social state, are destined to disappear just in proportion, and only so far, as Christian principles become predominant among us. As in mountainous regions the shadows of the landscape lessen when the sun goes up warmly and bright into the zenith, so, in communities, where the spirit of a Christian sympathy is in the ascendant, and where men begin to realize their relations to each other, and to God, and to Christ, the sharp and gloomy shades of social inequality are mellowed and softened down. Harsh inequalities cannot long exist where the right idea of human brotherhood, or the spirit of a true philanthropy, comes to be the inherent and prevalent motive of society. That painful disparity we are sometimes called to witness, even in this country, between a bloated and monstrous opulence on the one hand, concentrated in a single individual, who counts his yearly income by millions, while he lounges or is pampered in a palace of marble, and the starving indigence of another man, who sits in rags on the doorstep of that millionaire gnawing the flesh

off his own poor fingers in desperation — this contrast, I say, is a blot upon our social institutions, which can countenance or allow such a broad gulf of inequality between children of the same father. It rebukes our boasted civilization. It portends a rupture in our social tie, to be consummated only, it may be, by the flinging aside of our republican theories of life and the instalment of all the invidious and nauseous habits and contrasts of European aristocracy. Nay, more, it violates, somewhere or somehow, the laws of God's providence, which ordain, I think, that no one can rightfully grapple or appropriate more of God's bounty than he can well use or turn to some generous account. Whatever may be said of an unequal distribution of property, as one of the appointments of God for wise ends of social discipline, it cannot be supposed he ever intended that monstrous yawning gulf of contrast we sometimes witness, between the extreme of opulence on the one hand, and the extreme of want on the other. For what *is* the extreme of want? What does it say or indicate? It is — if I may use a figure — the ugly and retributive ghost of misused property at the other end of the scale.

The extreme of poverty in its last analysis, is but the shadow which is offset or projected by the mountain of extreme worldly prosperity somewhere else. The length, breadth and depth of that shadow is proportioned even to the height or bulk of the opposite mountain — and still more to the lowness of our sun of sympathy in the horizon.

Still we do not say that the mountain must be levelled or exploded to shorten the shadow. But we may

and do pray that "the sun of righteousness" may surmount the proud summit, bathe it in better light, melt the frost upon its forehead, and send the streams of its beneficence far adown its flinty sides into the suffering vales, till the deserts blossom and the wilderness shall sing. We do pray for a fuller realization and application of the great fraternal, all-embracing principles of Christianity, and this it is which constitutes the sum of our duty towards the poor. It is not merely to give external comforts, or the means of present subsistence, a largess of mere bodily nourishment or defence, but to unfold, elevate, direct and strengthen that *inner life* which is to stretch far into infinity beyond the present world. And this it is which every soul needs. This it is which illustrates the tie of our common brotherhood. This it is which is to bind and bless the wide world, and bring about that consummation when all shall know God the only living and true, and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent. This it is which is to annihilate whatever is false in external distinctions, and realize those fruits of charity when all men "from the least even unto the greatest," the poor, the sorrow-stricken, the forsaken, shall have their feet shod as with "the preparation of the gospel of peace," and receive "the garment of praise for the spirit of their heaviness."

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